

# The Lord's Temptations

Excerpts from a sermon by Rev. Mark Carlson

The Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church gives us certain basic truths concerning the Lord's temptations. Like all people who regenerate, the Lord in His glorification experienced two distinctly different states during His life on earth. When He taught His followers, and when He performed miracles, He was in a state of glorification. This was a peaceful and happy state in which He was completely aware of His own inner Divinity and was in the sure knowledge that His mission would succeed. But the other state He often experienced was a state of humiliation. In this state the Lord was not sure of His inner Divinity, and He was not sure that He could succeed in saving humankind from the grip of hell. It was in this state that the Lord suffered unspeakable temptations. Every temptation is more or less severe in proportion to the love that is being tempted, and with the Lord it was infinite love that suffered. The disciples were only aware of three periods in the Lord's life when He was tempted: once, after His baptism by John, when He spent forty days in the wilderness, once in the Garden of Gethsemane when His sweat became mingled with blood, and finally His passion on the cross. But the Heavenly Doctrine reveals something new: the Lord experienced such temptations often, beginning in early childhood.

The Heavenly Doctrine informs us further that the Lord's temptations were a result of the hereditary evil He had taken on from Mary, so that the hells might have a means to attack Him, and that He might have an approach to the hells. This hereditary evil caused the Lord's sight of truth to be clouded, causing doubts to arise. And doubt is the heart of temptation. The Heavenly Doctrine calls the Lord's temptations the temptation of truth bound. For in the Lord's mind, truth was indeed at times bound by the subtle persuasions of falsity rushing in from the whole of the hells. Thus it was not the Divine love that was obscured, but only the Divine wisdom, and in such states of humiliation the Lord did indeed lose sight of the truth, particularly—the truth of His own inner Divinity, and when He entered into such states, He did as any person would do—He prayed to the Father in heaven.

The Lord's final temptation on the cross was of course the worst of all. All doubt and temptation must end in a state of despair if their purpose is to be achieved. For the Lord this despair took the form of an apparent separation from His own inner Divinity coupled with the intense appearance of failure. The hells were attempting to persuade Him that the human race could not be saved, and all about Him this appearance seemed to be confirmed—everywhere He looked there was nothing but hatred for Him. He was spat upon, physically assaulted, verbally abused, and now He hung upon a cross, condemned to death with common thieves. The agony of the nails through His hands and feet, symbolically representing the frustration of the Divine power, invited the influx of the hells all the more, now mustering their last desperate attempt to defeat Him, persuading, always persuading: You have failed. And as the blood and strength drained from His body, the cry for life itself was added to the clamor of the hells. Apparently alone, the infinite Divine Love cried out in despair: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" These words could as easily be translated, "My soul, My soul, why have You forsaken Me?" And so it was that the Lord's Divine love alone suffered the supreme attack of the hells without the comfort which could be given through the perspective of the Divine wisdom. So fierce was the battle that with one final scream the body yielded, unable to further endure the dual torture. In that moment of apparent defeat the victory was won.